Artists of the First Fleet

A lasting outcome of the arrival of the First Fleet was the artwork produced from the earliest days of settlement. These drawings depict Indigenous people and the Australian environment at the point of colonisation in 1788.

Many of the artists from the First Fleet were naval officers, such as William Bradley and George Raper, whose formal training included sketching and watercolour painting. Some artists remain unknown and may have included convicts.
Lord Howe Island, 1787-1789 by Arthur Bowes Smith  Call # Safe 1 / 15  [2]
Digital ID: a604007
View collection item detail [3]

a604004h.jpg [4]
The Kangaroo, 1787-1789 by Arthur Bowes Smith [Call # Safe 1 / 15]

Digital ID: a604004

View collection item detail
William Bradley (1757?–1833)

It was part of a naval officer’s formal training to learn to draw coastal profiles, charts and views. With 29 watercolours inserted between its pages, the journal of First Lieutenant William Bradley contributes to the important artistic record of European settlement in Australia.

Bradley’s illustrations raise many questions. We can’t know if any of the drawings were painted while Bradley was in New South Wales, or later on his return to England. In general, their level of accuracy suggests that he was working from something other than recollection, however his depiction of the Fleet entering Port Jackson seems to portray Sydney’s North and South Heads in reverse.

Bradley’s illustrations are on several different types of paper, some watermarked, some not. All have been titled, and some have been initialled or dated. Some have been bound into his journal, others hinged in and perhaps, therefore, produced later... [8]

View all of William Bradley’s watercolours [9]
`Sirius, Supply & Convoy : Needle Point ENE 3 miles. Hyaena in Company. 13 May 1787" [Call # Safe 1/14]

**Digital ID:** a3461001

[View collection item detail]
Santa Cruz on the SE side of Teneriffe; Sirius & Convoy in the Roads. June 1787. The Peak Shewing in a Gap between two other Mountains'  William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]

Digital ID: a3461002

View collection item detail [13]

a3461003h.jpg [14]
“Villyanon, Convent del Gloria to the Aqueduct. Rio Janeiro 1787” William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461003
View collection item detail [15]

a3461004h.jpg [16]
‘In Rio Janeiro, looking towards the Entrance. 1787’ William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461004
View collection item detail [17]

a3461005h.jpg [18]
‘View of a Fortified Bay on the E side the entrance of Rio Janeiro’ William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461006
View collection item detail [21]
``Fortified Bay on the Wt side the entrance of Rio Janeiro Coast of Brazil'  William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461007
View collection item detail [23]

a3461008h.jpg [24]
`Cape Town, Table Mountain &c; Sirius & Convoy in Table Bay, November. 1787` William Bradley
Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461008
View collection item detail [25]

a3461009h.jpg [26]
`Botany Bay. Sirius & Convoy going in : Supply & Agents Division in the Bay. 21 Janry 1788’  William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]

Digital ID: a3461009

View collection item detail [27]

a3461010h.jpg [28]
`Entrance of Port Jackson 27 January 1788`  William Bradley

Call # Safe 1/14 [9]
Digital ID: a3461010
View collection item detail [29]

George Raper (1768? - 1797)

Like William Bradley, Midshipman George Raper received naval training in drawing. Raper joined the *Sirius* as Able-Bodied Seaman and was promoted to Midshipman during the voyage to New South Wales. He made voyages to Cape Town and Norfolk Island before returning to England in 1792.

During his time away he produced an impressive number of watercolour works mainly of birds, flowers, fish and Aboriginal implements, coastal profiles and topographical views. The Library's collections include botanical drawings and drawings of fish by Raper.

Stranded on Norfolk Island by the wrecking of the *Sirius* in March 1790, Raper recorded the Island's settlements including two views of Arthur's Vale.
Richard Pulteney

These drawings of Australian flora and fauna [30], some dated 1797, were owned by English botanist, Richard Pulteney. The artist is not known and the works may have been created in England.

Robert Anderson Seton

This album of watercolour drawings of Australian natural history [31] was owned by Robert Anderson Seton and dates from around 1800. The album is comprised of copies of sketches from Governor John Hunter's sketchbook, 'Birds & Flowers of New South Wales drawn on the spot in 1788, 89 and 90'.

Arthur Bowes Smyth

Surgeon on the Lady Penrhyn, Bowes Smyth’s journal contains 25 watercolour and pen and ink drawings [32]. His drawings include the earliest extant illustration by a European of the emu. The earliest was possibly drawn by Lieutenant John Watts, also of the Lady Penrhyn, and was reproduced in Arthur Phillip's published account of the First Fleet. Watts’ original drawing is now lost.

Philip Gidley King

A series of five watercolour drawings [33] of Indigenous people have been attributed to naval officer and future Governor, Philip Gidley King. It is known that King sketched but no signed works by him are known to exist.

c050140012h.jpg [34]
Collection 23: Australian fishes, 1774-1794 / George Raper, and unknown artist

View collection item detail [36]c050140012

Explore further George Raper's watercolours:

View of the West Side of Arthur's Vale, ca 1790s [37]
View of the East Side of Arthur's Vale, ca 1790s [38]
George Raper's Australian flowers [39]
George Raper's Australian fishes [40]
100 works by an artist, or artists, identified only as the Sydney Bird painter [41]

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